

Abstract
Reasons Why Children Re-enter Foster Care
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Description of the Quantitative Study

The purpose of the quantitative study was to investigate if alcohol and drug abuse is an important reason for children re-entering foster care after reunification has occurred. This was an explanatory one shot case study that looked at reasons why children re-enter foster care.

A non-probability availability sample of two groups of children in the Lincoln Trail Region of Kentucky was used. The first group consisted of 25 case files from families whose children entered foster care and were returned home, without re-entering within the past four years. The second group consisted of 25 case files from families whose children entered and re-entered foster care within the past four years. Chart file reviews were the data collection tools used. Cases were reviewed to determine if substance abuse was detected prior to the removal of the child the first and second time. Cases were also reviewed to determine if child neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, court and police involvement were present for the families that are related to the substance abuse in the families.

A chi-square test of independence was calculated to determine if the two groups were similar in terms of gender and ethnicity. No significant difference was found regarding gender (chi-square = .325, $p > .05$) or regarding ethnicity (chi-square = .000, $p > .05$). An independent t-test comparing the mean scores of the two groups in terms of age found a significant difference between the two groups ($t = 2.43$, $p < .05$) at the first removal. No significant difference was found in terms of number of siblings ($t = 1.31$, $p > .05$). A chi-square test of independence was used to determine a significant difference in terms of child neglect (chi-square = 3.95, $p = .05$). A significant difference was found. No significant difference was found in substance abuse (chi-square = 2.01, $p > .05$). The groups are different according to their ages at first removal. The second group's children were younger at first removal. The families seem to become unstable at an earlier age. The second group seems to have had more incidences of child neglect related to substance abuse. The second group deteriorated and had more incidences of substance abuse, and related problems are prevalent in the group before the second removal.

Description of the Qualitative Study

The purpose of the qualitative study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the dynamics in the substance abuse family that lead to children re-entering foster care. A descriptive narrative design was used. An availability sampling of three biological substance abuse families from the Lincoln Trail Region in Kentucky where children were removed for a second time was used. Secondary data was collected from case files where the histories of families were traced.

Themes that emerged regarding the family history were that the parents whose children re-entered foster care were not raised by their own biological parents, all three mothers had teenage pregnancies, and parents did not have a high school education or equivalent. The financial history was not stable and at least one parent received SSI. All three families had a history with child protective services. Their cases were open for at least 7 years. The parents had open child

protective services cases when they were children. Two out of the three case files reviewed revealed that the families did not attend drug and alcohol counseling, but the families did receive extensive social work counseling. The families where children re-entered the foster care system come from a very unstable family history. The social work counseling did not help these families to deal with their problems effectively. More services are needed dot help these families to become stable.

Impact on Practice

Social workers should be careful to place children back with biological families if their families are not stable. Future research should investigate tools used to make decisions on re-unification. More research on the quality of services rendered by social workers to these families would helpful.

Reasons Why Children Re-enter Foster Care

Presented by Debbie Owens

Introduction

- Purpose of the Quantitative Study - to investigate if alcohol and drug abuse is an important reason for children re-entering foster care after reunification has occurred.
- Purpose of the Qualitative Study - to gain an in-depth understanding of the dynamics in the substance abuse family that lead to children re-entering foster care.

The Literature Review

- Re-referrals of neglect and abuse occur because of lack of properly identifying the effects of caretaker substance abuse on children (Thompson, L. 1990).
- More than 6.6 million children live in alcoholic households, and more live in homes where the parents abuse other drugs (Prevent Child Abuse America, 2001).

The Literature Review

(continued)

- Once child maltreatment was substantiated, children in alcohol or drug abusing families were more likely to enter foster care than were children in other maltreating families. Children whose parents use drugs or alcohol are more likely to re-enter foster care after they have been returned to their parents (The Department of Health and Human Services, 1993).

Importance to Social Work

- Children in substance abuse families are at risk of being neglected and at risk of out-of-home placement.
- Social workers in child protection agencies and other community partners need to be able to properly identify those children at risk of neglect in order to prevent re-entry into out-of-home care.

The Quantitative Question

“Is alcohol and drug abuse one of the reasons why children are referred into out-of-home care for a second time?”

Quantitative Method

- Design - Explanatory one shot case study that looks at reasons why children re-enter foster care.
- Sample - A non-probability availability sample of two groups of children in the Lincoln Trail Region of Kentucky:
 - Group 1: 25 case files from families whose children entered foster care and were returned home, without re-entering within the past four years.
 - Group 2: 25 case files from families whose children entered and re-entered foster care within the past four years.

Quantitative Data Collection

- Data Collection Tool: Chart File Reviews
- Independent variable - Substance Abuse
- Dependent variable - Re-entry into out-of-home care
- Cases reviewed to determine if substance abuse was detected prior to the removal of the child (first and second time)
- Also reviewed if child neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, court and police involvement were present for the families that are related to the substance abuse in the families

Demographics

- **Group 1**

- 10 males and 15 females
- 18 Whites and 7 Non-Whites
- Mean age at time of removal: 11.28 (SD=5.61)
- Mean number of siblings at removal: 2 (SD=1.5)

- **Group 2**

- 12 males and 13 females
- 18 Whites and 7 Non-Whites
- Mean age at time of removal (1st): 7.88 (SD=4.20)
- Mean number of siblings at removal = 1.52 (1.05)

Matching

Are the groups similar in terms of their demographics?

	Chi-Square	P Value
Gender	.325	p = .569
Ethnicity	.000	p = 1.0
	t-test	
Age	2.43	p = .02
No. of Siblings	1.31	p = .20

The groups are significantly different in terms of age at first removal.

The second group is younger at first removal. The first group seems to be more stable with children removed later.

Issues Related to Substance Abuse Prior to First Removal for 2 Groups

	Only 1 Removal and back in home	2 Removals back in Foster Care	Chi Square	Phi
Known Substance Abuse	11	16	2,01	0.15
Child Neglect	10	17	3,95	0.05
Physical Abuse	1	3	*	*
Sexual Abuse	1	3	*	*
Police Reports	4	5	*	*
Court Appearance	2	5	*	*
Legal Fines	1	5	*	*

* Low cell counts

Issues Related to Substance Abuse for Second Group

	1st Removal n=25	2nd Removal n=25
Known Substance Abuse	16	21
Child Neglect	17	21
Physical Abuse	3	3
Sexual Abuse	3	2
Police Report	5	7
Court Appearances	5	6
Legal Fines	5	6

Discussion

- The groups are different in terms of their age at first removal. The second group's children were younger at first removal. The families seem to become unstable at an earlier age.
- The groups are significantly different in terms of child neglect. The second group seems to have more incidences of child neglect related to substance abuse.
- The second group deteriorates and more incidences of substance abuse, and related problems are prevalent in the group before second removal.

The Qualitative Question

“What are the family dynamics of the biological substance abuse families of children who re-enter foster care?”

Qualitative Method

- Design: Descriptive narrative
- Sampling: Availability sampling of three biological substance abuse families from the Lincoln Trail Region in Kentucky where children were removed for a second time
- Data Collection: Secondary data collected from case files where history of families were traced

Demographics

- Two Caucasian families and one Bi-Racial family (African American father and White/Native-American mother)
- Ages of mother at first removal: 21, 23, 25
- At time of first removal: one married couple (Caucasian), one separated (bi-racial), one never married (Caucasian)
- Number of children at first removal: 1, 2, 2
- Substance abusers: 1 father (bi-racial) and 3 mothers

Themes

- **Family History**
 - Parents not raised by biological parents
 - Teenage pregnancies
 - Drugs and alcohol in the homes
 - Parents did not have high school education or equivalent
- **Financial History**
 - Lack of financial stability
 - One parent received SSI
- **Agency History**
 - Parents had open CPS cases as children
 - Family cases were open for 7 years or more
- **Counseling**
 - 2 out of 3 families did not attend drug and alcohol counseling
 - Families received extensive social work counseling

Discussion

- Families where children re-entered the foster care system come from a very unstable family history
- Social work counseling did not help these families to deal with their problems in an effective manner
- More services are needed to help these families to stabilize

Conclusions and Future Research

- Social workers should be careful to place children back with biological families if these families are not stable.
- Weakness of study: availability sampling with only secondary data.
- Future research:
 - Investigate the assessment tools used to make decisions on re-unification.
 - Investigate the quality of services rendered by social workers to these families